

Pedaling the Quad Cities



The bike path passes sculptures on Credit Island that depict the scene from "Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte," a painting by French Impressionist Georges Seurat.



The Skybridge connects downtown Davenport with its riverfront.



The world's largest roller dam is part of Lock & Dam No. 15.

Bike paths on both sides of the Mississippi River help riders combine sightseeing, exercise

By Katherine Rodeghier
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DAVENPORT, Iowa — Am I seeing things?

Just last week, I was wandering through the French Impressionist galleries at the Art Institute of Chicago and stopped to admire the massive canvas on which Georges Seurat painted "Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte."

Now I'm pedaling a bike along the Mississippi River, 200 miles away, and am brought up short by the same scene. I blink.

Ten life-size figures from the painting stand on an island in the river, just off the bike path. Carved from fallen oak trees and painted by local high school students, they seem weirdly out of context. As I walk among them, other riders brake, dismount and come to have a look at the surreal setting. Who wouldn't?

The sculptures on Credit Island, a park named for transactions that occurred here between American Indians and fur traders, were funded by River Action. The environmental group fosters the protection and enjoyment of the Mississippi and its riverfront in the Quad Cities.

One of its projects is this bike path, part of the River-Way, nearly 100 miles of parks, trails and overlooks.

Visitors like me pedal along, taking in the scenery and sights. Sure, we could drive along the riverfront, but what's the fun in that? On a bike we get some exercise and learn a bit about the Quad Cities by visiting places like Rock Island Arsenal, Lock and Dam No. 15, John Deere Commons, the Colonel Davenport House and Government Bridge. Oh, and there's shopping in the boutiques

of the village of East Davenport, concerts at LeClaire Park and baseball games at Modern Woodmen Park.

If you don't bring your own bike, you can rent one at visitors' centers in Davenport, Rock Island and Moline — though hours are limited on weekends. Pick up a bike trail map there or download one from the River Action site, riveraction.org. You can even use a smartphone to take an e-tour using QR codes or Web addresses on signs along the trail.

I start my ride in Davenport, renting a bike from the visitor center at Union Station on the bike path in LeClaire Park. On Saturday mornings in summer and early fall, there's a farmers market set up in the parking lot here. The nearby band shell plays host to concerts and festivals most weekends during the warm months with people bringing lawn chairs and picnic baskets or buying food from the Freight House, an old railroad warehouse converted into eateries, a taproom and shops.

Modern Woodmen Park crouches next to Centennial Bridge. The baseball stadium is the home of the Quad Cities River Bandits, the minor league team affiliated with the Houston Astros. There's no game today, so I push on, happily pedaling along miles of flat, paved path along the river. The city of Davenport owns almost nine miles of riverfront and has devoted its resources to keeping it spiffy. What was once a city dump has been transformed into a recreation area with unobstructed river views.

After making the circuit around Credit Island, I double back and stop at the \$7 million Skybridge, an enclosed pedestrian walkway linking downtown Davenport with the riverfront. The view from the top is well-worth the trip up the elevator and helps me get my bearings. As we all learned in geography class, the Mississippi River runs from north



In Rock Island, the bike path passes along the Mississippi River levee.

to south down the midsection of the country, but in the Quad Cities it takes a sharp turn and flows from east to west. From the Skybridge, I look south across the river to Rock Island.

I decide to go there, so I make my way to Government Bridge. Built in 1896, it's a double-decker bridge with railroad tracks above and a road for vehicles below. A marvel of engineering, it has a span that rotates 360 degrees to accommodate traffic on the river. Lucky for me, it has a section for walkers and bicyclists that separates us from the road.

I cross and soon find myself in The District — Rock Island's night life and entertainment neighborhood. It's quiet in the daytime with kids dodging spurts from an interactive fountain and clamoring on a playground at Schwiebert Riverfront Park.

The bike trail also runs east to Moline where a short detour leads to the John Deere Pavilion, one of the Quad Cities' biggest visitor attractions. Exhibits tell the story of John Deere and the founding of his agricultural equipment company. Adults can try their skill with machine

simulators and kids can learn where their food comes from in a hands-on Discovery Zone.

During summer and early fall, bicyclists have the option of crossing the river here on the Channel Cat Water Taxi, an open-air pontoon boat. One of its stops is East Davenport, a historic district that dates back to 1851 when it was a logging town. Now it's a cute enclave of shops, galleries, pubs and restaurants.

Quad Cities' visitors are drawn to the Rock Island Arsenal, an active military U.S. Army facility on Arsenal Island in the Mississippi and, with 8,600 workers, the biggest employer in the bi-state region. It has the only foundry owned by the U.S. government and makes



Fountains at Schwiebert Riverfront Park bring out the kid in bicyclists passing on the adjacent bike trail.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF KATHERINE RODEGHIER



Barges squeeze into the lock below Government Bridge at Lock & Dam No. 15.



One of many sculptures on Credit Island that depict the scene from "Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte," a painting by French Impressionist Georges Seurat.

Quad Cities

Getting there: The Quad Cities area is about 180 miles from suburban Chicago.

Where to rent bikes: Bikes can be rented, with helmets and locks, at three Quad Cities Visitor Centers. Union Station at 102 W. Harrison St., Davenport, Iowa; 1601 River Drive, Suite 110, Moline, Ill.; and 226 17th St., Rock Island, Ill. Rentals available from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday, closed Sunday from April 1 to Nov. 1. Fees are \$7 per hour or \$28 per day. Tandem bike and kiddie trailers are also available.

Where to stay: Hotel Blackhawk, 200 E. Third St., Davenport, Iowa, (888) 525-4455, hotelblackhawk.com. Reopened after a multimillion-dollar renovation and now part of Marriott hotels, the 130-room landmark 1915 property has modern amenities and a hip vibe. Check out Bix Bistro and, in the basement, a vintage bowling alley and martini lounge. Room rates this summer and fall from about \$235.

Radisson Quad City Plaza, 111 E. Second St., Davenport, Iowa, (800) 967-9033, radisson.com. Overlooks the Mississippi River in downtown Davenport. Room rates this summer and fall from about \$119.

Where to eat: Blue Cat Brew Pub, 113 18th St., Rock Island, (309) 788-8247, bluecatbrewpub.com. Serves six beers brewed on site and food ranging from light vegetarian dishes to hearty pub fare. Open 11 a.m. to 2 a.m. Monday through Saturday.

• Fresh Deli by Nostalgia Farms, 421 W. River Drive, Davenport, (563) 424-4561. Located in the Freight House by LeClaire Park. Menu items include salads, soups and sandwich sliders. Open 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. Monday through Saturday.

Miscellaneous: Channel Cat Water Taxi transports passengers and bikes daily Memorial Day through Labor Day with a limited schedule into October. \$6 adults, \$3 kids. (309) 788-3360 or gogreenmetro.com.

Bicycle tours of Arsenal Island: A park ranger from the Mississippi River Visitor Center will lead a six-mile bike tour of the island from 9:30 to 11:30 a.m. Oct. 12. (309) 794-5338 or missriver.org.

More details: Quad Cities Convention and Visitors Bureau: (800) 747-7800 or visitquadcities.com.

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PHOTOS COURTESY OF KATHERINE RODEGHIER

The city of Davenport owns more than nine miles of riverfront with parks for bicycling, walking and other forms of recreation.

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citizens must register at least a week in advance.

Bicyclists have access to all the public areas of Arsenal Island, including the bike trail around the golf course, and can stop at its many points of interest. The Arsenal Museum is known for its impressive small arms collection, about 1,200 guns, both military and civilian, U.S. and international. The Colonel Davenport House, completed in 1834, is on the National Register of Historic Places.

U.S. Army Col. George Davenport, the first permanent white settler in the Quad Cities, was sent here to establish Fort Armstrong and stayed to develop a fur trading business.

During the Civil War, Arsenal Island was a POW camp. More than 12,000 Confederate prisoners were held here and nearly 2,000 died. They are buried in the Confederate Cemetery, which flies the Confederate Flag on Memorial Day. A second cemetery, the Rock Island National Cemetery, has as many as 24,000 gravestones and is among the largest in the national cemetery system. It began in 1863 as the post cemetery for Union prison

The Colonel Davenport House on Arsenal Island is the oldest permanent residence in Davenport. The National Cemetery at Rock Island Arsenal dates back to the Civil War.



guards.

I cross the island to visit the Mississippi River Visitor Center overlooking Lock & Dam No. 15. Built in the 1930s by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, it's one of 29 dams regulating the level of the river's navigation channel between St. Paul and St. Louis. The second floor of the center is a great place to watch traffic on the river either inside or, on a nice day, on the outdoor observation deck. On weekends, park rangers give guided tours for a closer look at the locks. I watch as tugboats maneuver barges, most likely laden with grain, into the lock, wedging them in just inches apart.

The coal black ironwork of the Government Bridge looms above. I mount up and pedal back to the Iowa side, stopping to look at the world's largest roller dam before resuming my own rolling down the river to return my bike before the visitor center closes.

• *Information for this article was gathered during a writers' conference sponsored by the Quad Cities Convention and Visitors Bureau.*

